

**GIFFORDS WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 5397**

**TO:** PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

**SUBMITTED BY:** MOLLY VOIGT, SENIOR STATE LEGISLATIVE MANAGER,  
GIFFORDS and MIKE MCLIVELY, COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INITIATIVE POLICY  
DIRECTOR, GIFFORDS LAW CENTER TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

**DATE:** MARCH 28th, 2022

**SUBJECT MATTER:** TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB-5397, AN ACT DECLARING  
GUN VIOLENCE A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF  
GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Members of the Public Health Committee,

Giffords is a national gun violence prevention organization named after former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, who was shot in 2011 while hosting an event for her constituents in Tucson, Arizona. At Giffords, we work with legislators and advocates around the country to promote common sense solutions to gun violence. With our community violence work we recognize that the day-to-day shootings on our city streets that occur disproportionately in communities of color are one of the main drivers of America's gun violence epidemic.<sup>1</sup> This is also true in Connecticut, where more than half of the state's gun homicide victims are Black, and where young Black men are more than *39 times more likely* to be murdered with a gun than young white men.<sup>2</sup>

Across the nation over the past two years, we've seen a spike in homicides and shootings corresponding with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic,<sup>3</sup> including in Connecticut, where gun-related homicides have nearly doubled from 2018 levels, and where gun homicide in 2021 were at their *highest level in 25 years*. This is an epidemic that is not just taking lives, but also costing Connecticut taxpayers tens of millions of dollars annually.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Giffords, Community Violence, <https://giffords.org/issues/community-violence>.

<sup>2</sup> The Economic Cost of Gun Violence in Connecticut, Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Economic-Cost-of-Gun-Violence-in-Connecticut.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Researchers from the National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice found that across the country, "homicide rates increased 30% in 2020, a large and troubling increase that has no modern precedent." [https://craftmediabucket.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/Year\\_End\\_Crime\\_Update\\_Design.pdf](https://craftmediabucket.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/Year_End_Crime_Update_Design.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> The Economic Cost of Gun Violence in Connecticut, Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Economic-Cost-of-Gun-Violence-in-Connecticut.pdf>.

There is a clear and urgent need to respond to community violence with every available resource and not just law enforcement approaches, but also community and public-health based solutions. **That's why Giffords strongly supports HB 5397, which would not only declare gun violence a public health crisis, but also invest \$5 million to create a much-needed Office of Gun Violence Prevention within the Department of Public Health.**<sup>5</sup>

The Office of Gun Violence Prevention would serve several key functions, including collecting data on gun violence in Connecticut and making critical data publicly available to researchers and others, and making policy recommendations to decrease the effects of gun violence on public health. Most importantly, the office would create and administer a grant program to fund Connecticut organizations that implement evidence-informed, community-based initiatives to reduce gun violence through prevention and intervention strategies tailored to individuals at elevated risk of engaging in serious violence.

The violence intervention and prevention strategies that would be supported by the Office of Gun Violence Prevention are grounded in the root causes of violence and the real-world dynamics of how relationships, social norms, and peer networks influence behavior.<sup>6</sup> Public health-centered approaches like Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs, street outreach, cognitive behavioral therapy, and intensive peer mentoring use outreach, direct communication, and supportive relationships to engage those at greatest risk of gun violence, and disrupt what are often generational cycles of violence while providing transformational opportunities to high-risk young men.

In states like Massachusetts, *which has one of the lowest gun homicides rates in the nation*, large investments in such strategies are saving lives and taxpayer dollars: generating more than \$5.00 in savings for each dollar invested because of significant reductions in violence and crime recidivism rates.<sup>7</sup> Other states around the country are

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<sup>5</sup> CT HB 5397, <https://cga.ct.gov/2022/TOB/H/PDF/2022HB-05397-R00-HB.PDF>.

<sup>6</sup> Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, Healing Communities in Crisis, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/healing-communities-in-crisis-lifesaving-solutions-to-the-urban-gun-violence-epidemic>.

<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth Corporation, SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL YOUTH INITIATIVE (SSYI), <https://commcorp.org/programs/safe-and-successful-youth-initiative>.

taking significant action on this issue including in Illinois (\$250M),<sup>8</sup> California (\$200M),<sup>9</sup> Wisconsin (\$45M),<sup>10</sup> Pennsylvania (\$30M),<sup>11</sup> and New Jersey (\$10M).

A number of states have established offices of gun violence prevention with the organizational capacity to oversee grantmaking and program implementation similar to that called for by HB-5397.<sup>12</sup> Most recently, Washington political leaders proposed a \$4.5 million investment to expand their state's Office of Firearm Safety and Violence Prevention,<sup>13</sup> a bill is pending in Virginia that would invest \$27 million to create the Center of Firearm Violence Intervention and Prevention,<sup>14</sup> and a bill is pending in Minnesota to invest \$40 million in the creation of an Office of Public Safety Innovation.<sup>15</sup> Last year, leaders in Colorado invested \$3 million to create and fund the Office of Gun Violence Prevention within the state's department of public health.<sup>16</sup>

Given the urgency of community violence, and the promising fiscal outlook in Connecticut—with a projected budget surplus of more than \$2 billion,<sup>17</sup> and \$6.3 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act—<sup>18</sup>now is the time for a coordinated statewide effort to truly meet the moment.

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<sup>8</sup> Illinois invests \$250 million in community violence prevention programs, <https://www.kfvs12.com/2021/12/10/illinois-invests-250-million-community-violence-prevention-programs>.

<sup>9</sup> May Budget Revise: Governor Newsom Delivers Largest Ever State Investment in Gun Violence Prevention and Intervention Efforts; <https://asmcd.org/press-releases/may-budget-revise-governor-newsom-delivers-largest-ever-state-investment-gun-violence>.

<sup>10</sup> Evers allocating \$45M in federal funds to violence prevention, crime victim programs, <https://www.wpr.org/evers-allocating-45m-federal-funds-violence-prevention-crime-victim-programs>.

<sup>11</sup> Governor Wolf Announces \$23 Million in Second Round of Violence Intervention and Prevention Grant Program Awards, [https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-wolf-announces-23-million-in-second-round-of-violence-intervention-and-prevention-grant-program-awards/#:~:text=Governor%20Tom%20Wolf%20announced%20today,Crime%20and%20Delinquency%20\(PCCD\)](https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/governor-wolf-announces-23-million-in-second-round-of-violence-intervention-and-prevention-grant-program-awards/#:~:text=Governor%20Tom%20Wolf%20announced%20today,Crime%20and%20Delinquency%20(PCCD)).

<sup>12</sup> This includes NY, PA, IL, CO, WA.

<sup>13</sup> Proposed 2022 Supplemental Budget & Policy Highlights, [https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022\\_Supplemental\\_Budget\\_wBudgetSummaryTable\\_12-15.pdf](https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022_Supplemental_Budget_wBudgetSummaryTable_12-15.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> VA SB 487, <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?221+sum+SB487>.

<sup>15</sup> MN HF 2724, [https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF2724&version=0&session=ls92&session\\_year=2022&session\\_number=0](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF2724&version=0&session=ls92&session_year=2022&session_number=0).

<sup>16</sup> CO HB 21-1299, <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1299>.

<sup>17</sup> Despite vanishing federal COVID relief, CT's coffers swell to record levels, The CT Mirror, <https://ctmirror.org/2022/01/18/despite-vanishing-federal-covid-relief-cts-coffers-swell-to-record-levels>.

<sup>18</sup> Connecticut's Plan for the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OPM/Coronavirus/ARPA04262021GovLamontPlan.pdf>.



**That's why we urge you to support HB 5357 and the creation of the Connecticut Office of Gun Violence Prevention.** Giffords works with state administrators around the country who implement state-level community violence reduction programs and is available to assist in any way, including sharing best practices and lessons learned from other states. Given the crisis of community violence, and the unique fiscal opportunity in Connecticut, the time to act is now.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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Gifford Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence

Molly Voigt  
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Giffords